

# YOUR HEALTH & WELL BEING



CIGNA HealthCare  
A Business of Caring.



## Detecting and Treating Cancer

The earlier cancer is diagnosed and treated, the better the chance of it being cured. Most cases of cancer are detected and diagnosed after a tumor can be felt or when other symptoms develop. In a few cases, cancer is diagnosed incidentally as a result of evaluating or treating other medical conditions.

Diagnosis begins with a thorough physical examination. If the diagnosis is positive (meaning cancer is present), other tests are performed to provide specific information about the cancer. If your initial diagnosis is made by a primary care doctor, he or she will refer you to a doctor who specializes in cancer treatment.

### WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS?

A comprehensive cancer program combines both curative and supportive treatment. Curative treatment attempts to kill or slow the disease with some combination of surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy and possibly hormone therapy or immunotherapy.

Supportive care from nurses and other professionals accompanies cancer treatment. The goal is to relieve pain and other symptoms, maintain general health, and provide emotional, psychological and logistical support to patients and their families. Similar supportive treatment is available to rehabilitate patients after treatment.

**Conventional Medicine.** The four standard cancer treatments are surgery, radiation, chemotherapy and biological therapy. Each is designed to remove or kill the malignant cells and can be used either to effect a cure or to relieve severe symptoms. Medication can help curb side effects during treatment, and most side effects resolve when the treatment is concluded.

### Alternative Medicine.

Alternative and unconventional treatments therapies may help improve quality of life and relieve physical and emotional stress. For example:

- By promoting relaxation, body-work therapies such as reflexology ease muscle tension and may alleviate other symptoms such as nausea and chronic pain. Body-work therapies also provide comforting physical contact, and can lessen the anxiety, depression and isolation that cancer patients often feel.
- Exercise can help control fatigue, muscle tension and anxiety. Patients tend to feel better if they do exercises such as walking or swimming, which calm the mind as well as strengthen the body.
- Some mind/body therapies work to improve quality of life through behavior modification; others encourage expression of

emotions. Patients who pursue these types of therapies tend to feel less lonely, less anxious about death, and more optimistic about recovery.

- Acupuncture and acupressure are perfect examples of complementary medicine for cancer. While neither cures the disease, evidence shows that they help reduce symptoms of the illness and side effects of the treatment.

Before trying any complementary cancer therapy, investigate it thoroughly with your doctor. Even the most promising unconventional therapies do not cure cancer and should never replace standard treatment.

**Social Support.** Having the support of friends and family can help you deal with the depression, fear and anxiety that accompany a serious illness. In some cases, a strong support network can even affect the length of survival of cancer patients.

For more information about cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment, visit [myCIGNA.com](http://myCIGNA.com). You also can call the CIGNA HealthCare 24-Hour Health Information Line<sup>SM</sup> at 1.800.CIGNA24, or CIGNA HealthCare Member Services at the toll-free number on your ID card.

Source: *WebMD.com*, 2005.

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